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William C. Sullivan, Ex-F.B.I. Aide, 65, Is Killed in a Hunting Accident

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William C. Sullivan, former head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's intelligence operations who broke in dramatic fashion with the late J. Edgar Hoover, was killed early yesterday in a shooting accident near his home in Sugar Hill, N.H. He was 65 years old.

Maj. Mason J. Butterfield, law enforcement director of the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, said that Mr. Sullivan, who had been on the way to meet two hunting companions shortly after daybreak, had been shot and instantly killed by another hunter, Robert Daniels Jr., 22, who had mistaken Mr. Sullivan for a deer.

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Mr. Sullivan's 30-year career with the F.B.I. began in the early days of World War II, when he was dispatched by Mr. Hoover on an undercover Intelligence mission to neutral Spain.

After several months of tangling with Axis spies in Madrid, Mr. Sullivan returned to bureau headquarters in Washington and took the first in a series of administrative posts that ultimately included a decade as head of the domestic intelligence division and a brief tenure as the bureau's third-ranking official behind Mr. Hoover, the director, and his longtime companion, Clyde A. Tolson.

Mr. Sullivan, who acquired a reputation as the only liberal Democrat ever to break into the top ranks of the bureau, retired in 1971 after he arrived at his office one morning to find that Mr. Hoover had ordered the lock on his door changed and his nameplate removed. That incident, widely reported at the time, was the culmination of increasing friction between the two men over Mr. Sullivan's private, and then public, insistence that Mr. Hoover had greatly overemphasized the threat to national security posed by the American Communist Party while devoting less attention than was warranted to violations of Federal civil rights laws in the South.

Mr. Sullivan was known both within the bureau and by a wide and distinguished circle of acquaintances outside it as less a policeman than a scholar, one whose interests ranged from theoretical Marxism, on which he was an acknowledged expert, to modern English poetry.

Mr. Sullivan held advanced degrees from American and George Washington Universities and an honorary doctorate from Boston College.

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leadership of the bureau and of its controversial counterintelligence programs, including some that he himself had conceived and administered.

Testifying two years ago before the Senate Intelligence Committee, which termed some of his official actions abusive and even illegal, Mr. Sullivan declared, “Never once did I hear anybody, including myself, raise the question, ‘Is this course of action which we have agreed upon lawful, is it legal, is it ethical Or moral?’”

The Senate investigation uncovered considerable detail about the counterintelligence programs, collectively labeled Cointelpro by the bureau, that were intended to spread confusion and dissension among extremist political groups in this country, ranging from the Communist Party on the left to the Ku Klux Klan on the right.

It also developed in the Senate investigations that Mr. Sullivan had been instrumental in arranging for the mailing of a tape recording in 1964 to Coretta Scott King, wife of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., that contained snippets of Dr. King's conversations with other women that had been overheard by concealed F.B.I. microphones.

Mr. Sullivan was in the news most recently a few weeks ago when he acknowledged that he had passed to subordinates instructions from Mr. Hoover to use whatever means were necessary in tracking down fugitive members of the Weather Underground organization in the early 1970's.

One former agent, John J. Kearney, is now the subject of a Federal indictment charging the bureau

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expected to have been a principal witness at Mr. Kearney's trial.

Mr. Sullivan, whose hopes for replacing Mr. Hoover as the bureau's director were dashed when the Nixon Administration installed L. Patrick Gray 3d as Mr. Hoover's successor, infuriated many of his longtime colleagues in 1973, a year after Mr. Hoover's death, when Mr. Sullivan publicly questioned Mr. Hoover's mental acuity during his last few years in office.

"I'm no doctor," he said at the time in assessing Mr. Hoover. "I can't make a judgment. But he had an unusual personality. In the last three years you couldn't depend upon him. He became extremely erratic."

Surviving are Mr. Sullivan's wife, Marion, two sons, William and Andrew, both law students in Boston, and a daughter, Joanne Tuttle. A funeral service will be held on Saturday in Hudson, Mass., Mr. Sullivan's birthplace.

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